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ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

ILLUSTRATIVE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

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Some of the greatest difficulties which beset the western mind in attempting to study the Bible are due to the fact that it is an eastern book. The biblical student has to learn to think orientally. Now a prolonged study of the Bible, especially if it is the only book much read, will produce an oriental cast of thought, as it did among our pious forefathers. For it is the unrivaled mediator between East and West. Yet such an unconscious orientalism is apt to be true to neither, because it recognizes neither, historically nor scientifically. The modern student will find it difficult to avoid misunderstandings unless he enters into the spirit of the East consciously and deliberately, sympathetically, but without losing his foothold on firm ground. To do this, he must familiarize himself with things oriental, ways of thought and speech, and the whole eastern man's outlook on life. To visit the Jews' quarter in a modern city is a revelation to many.¹ To make even a short tourist's trip in Palestine will present us with a fifth gospel.² The unchanging East has sent back many a traveler with a new Bible. Yet there must arise in the inquiring modern mind the question whether, after all, things were just the same as now in the days of David, or of David's Greater Son.

The man, therefore, who means to know his Bible will need also to study the monuments of that great past which preceded the life of Israel as a people, or was contemporary with it. The time has gone by when he might assume that the Hebrew people lived "in a pocket," as the geologists would say, cut off from all intercourse with other nations, and developing their religious life, like some microbic culture in a sterilized atmosphere under a glass shade, in splendid isolation. On the other hand, he may take it for granted,

¹ See A. K. Glover's articles, "Modern Jewish Customs," *Biblical World*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 7 ff.

² See *Biblical World*, Vol. XX, pp. 380 ff.

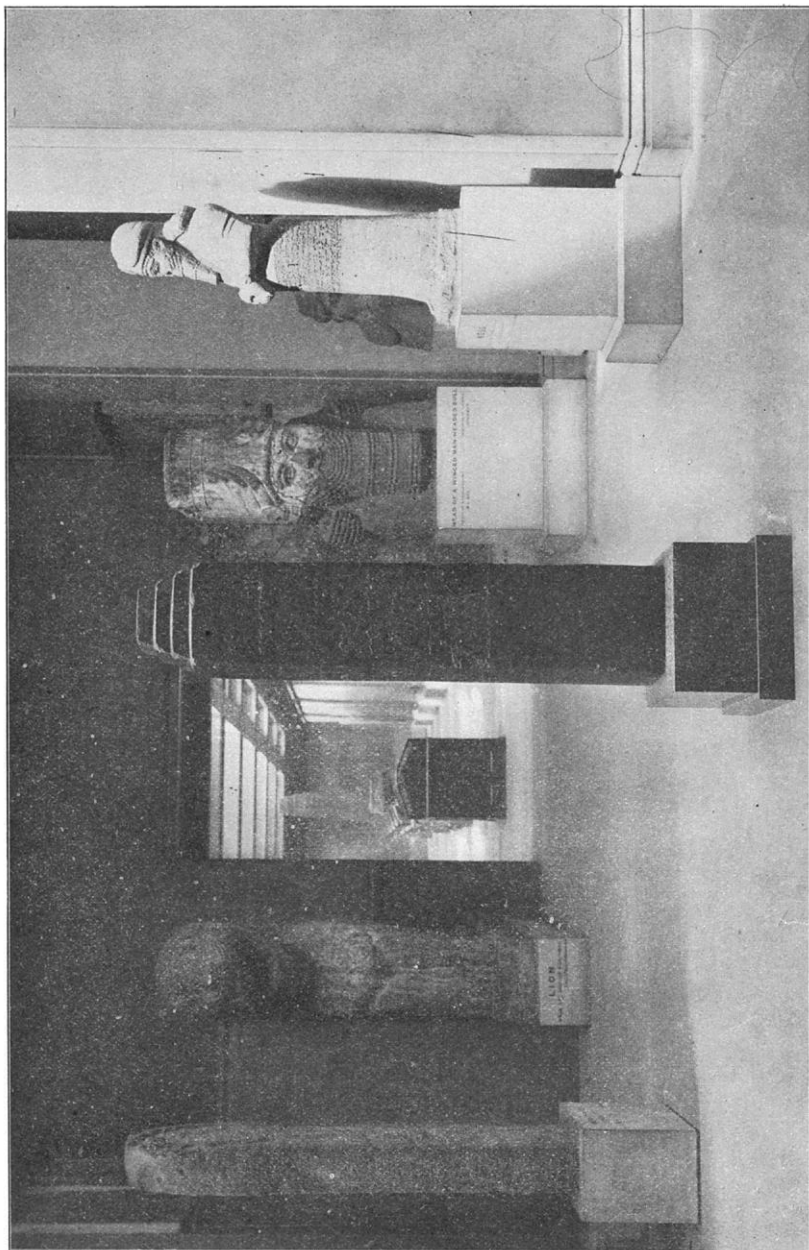


Photo by W. A. Mansell & Co.

NIMROUD CENTRAL SALOON—THE BRITISH MUSEUM

unless weighty reasons can be shown against it, that every great movement in Assyria or Babylonia, perhaps even in Egypt or Elam, was shortly known and discussed in Jerusalem. This is not to say that the Israelite adopted all the whims and fancies of his neighbors, or declined to think for himself, but that he lived in a highly charged atmosphere, situated between two poles of excitement, and conscious—at one time proudly resentful, at another admiringly receptive—of two great civilizations not his own. Too often he was the pawn which the one or the other of these great opponents moved before he came to close quarters with his adversary.

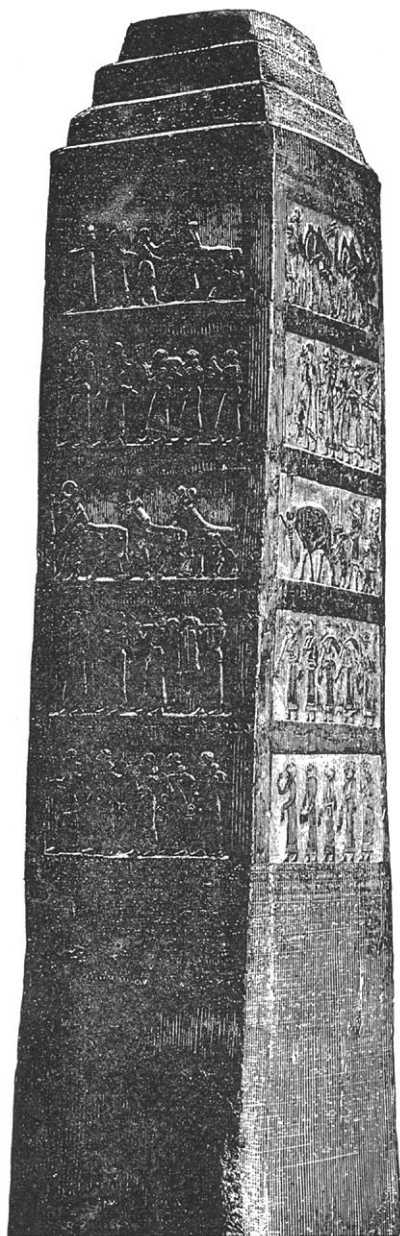
The student of the Bible, therefore, does well to acquaint himself with the sights the Hebrew saw outside his own land, or heard from the traders who visited him, and further to appreciate the far-distant past which had molded the civilizations with which he was always in contact. No better way can be adopted for this purpose than to spend a few days—better still weeks, if he can give the time—in such a hall of wizardry as the British Museum. Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, have been household words from our infancy; but how little have we penetrated the mists of awe which removed them from us! Here we may sit down and look upon the portrait of the man himself, drawn and cut in stone to his own order by contemporary artists; perhaps even handle the letters he wrote and received; at any rate, gaze long upon them. It almost takes the breath away thus to interview these giants of the past across the ages. It is no less thrilling, if somewhat gruesome, to gaze on the mummy of some dead Pharaoh. The conviction of their reality, of their essential likeness to ourselves, grows upon us till it would scarcely shock our nerves if they stepped down from the walls, or started to cast off their grave-clothes and stalk away in solemn majesty. Speak to us they do, and that more effectually than they could have done in life. For it is the Bible which is the medium of communication and the language is common to man.

The British Museum *Guides*³ are marvels of accuracy and fulness,

³ *Guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities*, 1s; *Guide to the First and Second Egyptian Rooms*, 1s; *Guide to the Third and Fourth Egyptian Rooms*, 1s. 6d.; *Guide to the Early Christian and Byzantine Antiquities*, 1s; *Guide to the Manuscripts*, etc., 6d.; all profusely illustrated; to be had at the entrance. It is a good plan, if time is short, to study these beforehand and mark what you specially wish to look at.

the Museum is a miracle of ticketing, and the student can thus obtain all the information about the objects exhibited which an expert could give to any but experts. He may depend upon it that, if his questions are not thus answered, either they cannot be or are irrelevant. A word of warning may be conveyed by the lesson which an enthusiastic friend once taught me. He was so overcome with unutterable feelings in the presence of these mighty dead that he waved me and my trivial *Guide* away with the words: "Let me be; I want to drink it in." He sat down, and I left him alone; but he was asleep in half an hour. The grand emotion is superb in its way, but the student is, above all, methodical. Method deals in lists and labels and tickets. Take the *Guide*, note the things that strike you, work them out at home, return and verify the impression if you can. Make the thing your own, and let it soak in.

Nimroud Central Saloon.—Here stands the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser II., who recounts upon it his conquests. Around the obelisk run bands of sculpture depicting the ambassadors of the conquered nations bringing



THE BLACK OBELISK OF SHALMANESER I

tribute. In four scenes, reproduced below, Jehu is represented as bringing tribute to Shalmaneser. It would, perhaps, be too great a compliment to the Assyrian artist to call his pictures portraits or to suppose that Jehu "sat" for him; but the details of dress and the



characteristic products of the land of Israel are unmistakably correct. Near by is the Monolith inscription of the same king, with



its mention of "Ahab king of the land of Israel" and of his ten thousand men at the battle of Karkar, as the ally of Hazael of Syria. On the walls are sculptures of Tiglath-Pileser III, the Pul of 2 Kings 15:9. Here we enter the palace court of an Assyrian

king, and, though there is no mention of Israel or Judah, the whole effect deserves prolonged study in order to grasp what "the great king" meant to the peoples of Palestine.⁴



Nimroud Gallery.—Here we have a reproduction of a palace at Nimroud, the Kalah of the Bible. The king whose sculptures line



the walls was Ashurnatsirpal. It is typical of the palaces of other Assyrian monarchs. In the show-cases are iron and bronze objects

⁴ See Dr. Max Kellner's article, "The Fall of the Kingdom of Israel," *Biblical World*, Vol. XXV, pp. 8 ff.

which exhibit the state of civilization, better than any verbal description. Note specially the priceless copper-bowl with the brood of Tiamat, the mythical offspring of chaos.⁵ It is the atmosphere of Assyrian thought which we want to transfer to our mental picture, and we can spare no detail, even from the foreground, which helps to throw it up sharply. Here are countless details for the purpose. As we pass to the Assyrian Saloon, we should notice the remains of the Hittite empire which once played such a great part as the antagonist of Egypt.⁶

The Assyrian Saloon.—Here we have more sculptures of Pul; others of Sennacherib; still more of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, 668 to 626 B. C. The eye will be at once arrested by the representation of scenes at the siege of Lachish. Above all, here is Sennacherib himself, seated upon his throne before the city of Lachish, while captives and spoil are brought before him.⁷ Down-stairs we find an inscription of Sargon, which refers to his conquests in Judah. Here, too, are the superb bronze bands and hinges which adorned the gates of Shalmaneser II's temple at Balâwât, with their marvelous repoussé work, picturing sieges and conquests, scenes in camp and on the march. The place is lined with sculptures which tell us what were the methods which made Assyria "mistress of the world," but also the hated foe of all her subjects.

The Nineveh Gallery.—Here the wall sculptures chiefly belong to the reign of Ashurbanipal and his campaigns against Elam, though some of the most interesting are concerned with the building operations of Sennacherib. One of his siege pieces may refer to Jerusalem. The attention of the student is, however, likely to be chained to the table cases which run down the center by the gallery. Here are selections from the great library of Ashurbanipal. The so-called "Creation Tablets," superbly edited by Mr. L. W. King, assistant in the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities,⁸ are here exhibited. In the same case are the fragments of the "Gilgamesh Legend," or "Nimrod Epos," the eleventh tablet of which gives

⁵ Table case C, No. 6; see the photograph in C. T. Ball's *Light from the East*, p. 2.

⁶ See especially Professor Dr. P. Jensen, in Hilprecht's *Explorations in Bible Lands in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁷ *Biblical World*, Vol. XXIII, p. 402.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, p. 317.

the Babylonian version of the deluge story. Here also is the tablet with the story of the infancy of Sargon I, with its remarkable likeness to the legends of Romulus and Remus, and also to the story of "Moses in the bulrushes." The bearings of these documents on the Bible are ably discussed by Professor Driver⁹ and Professor C. F. Kent.¹⁰

In another case are characteristic specimens of those most ancient lexicons and grammatical works which have resulted in the sound understanding of the deciphered monuments. Again, we can see the "Eponym Canons," or lists of kings and governors, who gave their names to their years of office, like the archons at Athens or the consuls at Rome, set forth in their chronological order, thus rendering Assyrian chronology exact as far back as 893 B. C. Then we see specimens of the letters and dispatches from the king to his vassals and governors, or from them to him, showing the internal and external politics even better than the formal inscriptions, exhibiting the private and public life, religious and civil institutions, in a way that no ancient historian ever thought of doing. Professor R. F. Harper is still editing these letters, though he has already published eight volumes of them. Then we get specimens of prayers, hymns, ritual books, omens and incantations, poems and fables, deeds of sale and other contracts, some with Aramaic dockets or reference notes,¹¹ book catalogues, library labels, lawbooks, history books, etc. It is true that without a knowledge of cuneiform these are merely curiosities, but in every case the *Guide* will give as much information as can be of use, even translating some of the most interesting examples.

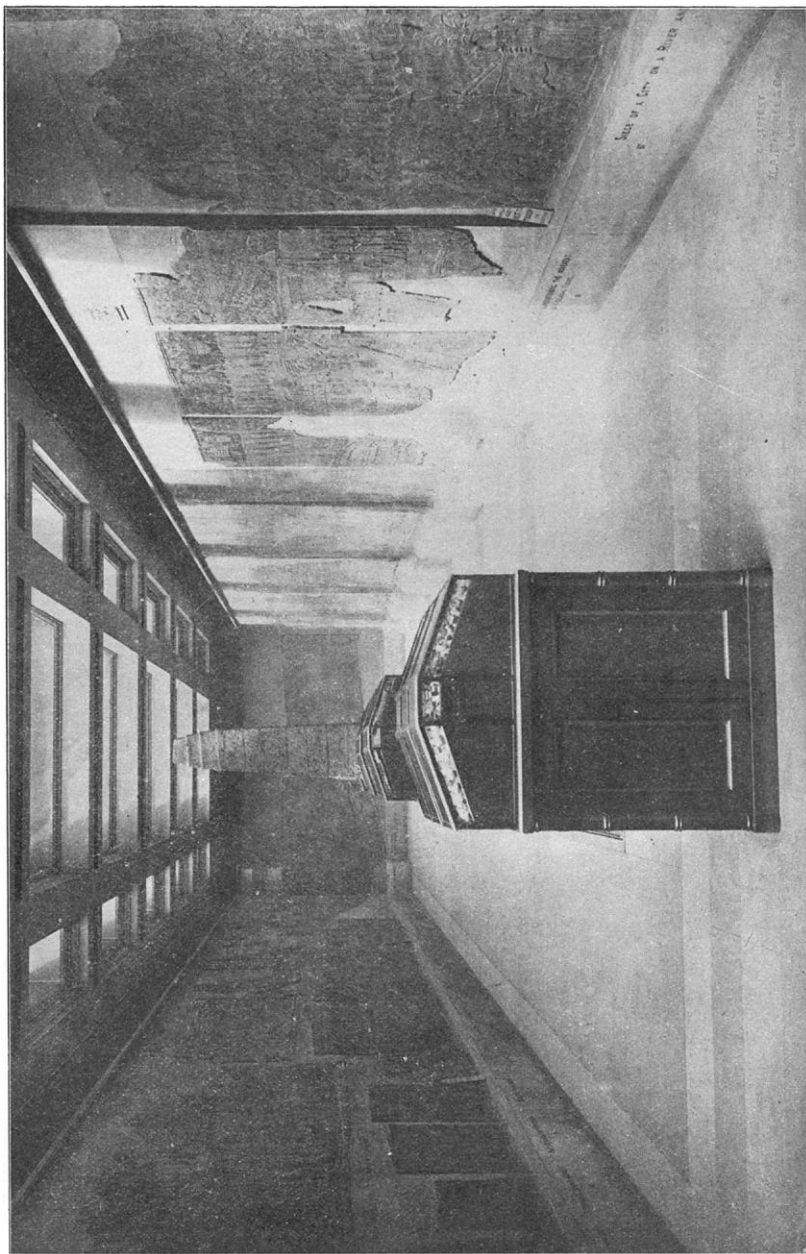
Some fragments of broken prisms in one case are especially noteworthy: Sargon's campaign against Ashdod;¹² Tiglath-Pileser III's reference to "Ahaz king of Judah," will interest the seeker for direct statements. The most valuable mental asset which the careful observer will gain, however, is his impression of the volume and extent of the literary activity of the Assyrian scribes, when he recalls that these are only specimens of the twenty thousand tablets

⁹ *Genesis*, in the "Westminster Commentaries."

¹⁰ In *The Beginnings of Hebrew History*; see *Biblical World*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 234, 465.

¹¹ See Professor J. H. Stevenson's *Assyrian and Babylonian Contracts*.

¹² Cf. Isa. 20:1.



NIMROUD GALLERY

Photo by W. A. Mansell & Co.

in the British Museum, and they but part of the library at Nineveh, and further reflects that every great city in Assyria and Babylonia had its library. Who can tell but that the royal library at Jerusalem may yet be discovered? Clay tablets are already being found in the smaller cities in Palestine, such as Lachish, Gezer, and Taanach, of widely separated dates, but all inscribed in cuneiform.

The Babylonian and Assyrian Room.—Up-stairs the treasures are just as striking. Here are specimens of early forms of writing, when the pictures had already given way to conventional signs, which, while directly descended from pictures, no longer retained much, if any, resemblance to the objects which those pictures had portrayed. The original pictures had, of course, been drawn with both curved and straight lines, and were shaded in an elementary fashion; now the curves have been replaced by broken lines made up of short straight strokes; but lines have not yet given way to wedges. It was a long step in advance; yet even these inscriptions are more ancient than the creation itself, on the old chronology of the Bible.

We soon come to a show-case filled with some of the finest and best-preserved of those Tell el-Amarna tablets which have revealed to us the internal politics of Palestine, before the Exodus. Letters from the now celebrated Abdi-heba (Servant of Yahweh?), king of Jerusalem, to his master the king of Egypt,¹³ hardly exceed in interest the letters from the kings of Alashiya, Assyria, Babylonia, and Mitanni, to their "brother the king of Egypt," or from the governors of Gaza, Gebal, Joppa, and Tyre, addressed to their "lord," the king. Especially significant is the tablet containing a mythological legend, punctuated in Egyptian fashion with red dots, showing that the Babylonian legends were studied in Egypt, doubtless by scribes who wished to perfect their knowledge of the Babylonian cuneiform, in which language and writing the rulers of Syria and Palestine wrote to their master. These tablets, and the many more of the same class at Berlin and Cairo, are all edited by Dr. Winckler, and translated also by him, in the fifth volume of Schrader's *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, English version by J. P. Metcalf. Their bearings on the Old Testament are set out in various books and articles too numerous to list here, but Professor L. B. Paton's

¹³ *Biblical World*, Vol. XXII, p. 10.

Syria and Palestine, in the "Semitic Series," is one of the most recent and helpful.¹⁴ Another case has the letters of Hammurabi, the celebrated king and legislator of Babylon, about 2285 B. C. Most of them are addressed by him to his governor Sin-idinnam, at Sippara, where they seem to have been found. They show what an intimate acquaintance the old Babylonian monarchs kept up with the details of their rule, even in distant cities and provinces. They reveal the public and private life of those days with astounding minuteness. These letters have also been splendidly edited by Mr. L. W. King.¹⁵ Hammurabi is thought by many scholars to be the Amraphel, king of Shinar, of Gen., chap. 14. Hence it will be of interest to many to see the inscriptions of Rim-Sin, king of Larsa, who is held to be the Arioch of Ellasar mentioned in the same chapter. These have recently been edited by Professor I. M. Price.¹⁶ The tablet on which Dr. T. G. Pinches thought he had found the names of Chedorlaomer, Arioch, and Tidal is here reproduced. Not far away stands a cast of the stele which Hammurabi set up in the Marduk temple of Esaggil, covered with his now celebrated code of laws, which, though perhaps a thousand years earlier, shows such a remarkable likeness to the Mosaic codes. A very full account from the pen of Professor C. F. Kent will be found in the *Biblical World*, Vol. XXI, pp. 175-90, and a comparison of it with the code of Moses, *ibid.*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 188 ff., pp. 272 ff., by Dr. G. S. Duncan. Illustrations of the stele will be found *ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 468 f., with suggestive comments by Professor I. M. Price. The most useful edition is by Professor R. F. Harper,¹⁷ but there is quite a large literature on the subject. The original is in the Louvre, but this cast is just as good for all practical purposes.

Another case contains the deeds of sale, contracts, and other legal documents, dated in the reigns of Hammurabi, his predecessors, and successors on the throne of Babylon, with their manifold information as to the private life and public institutions in the third millennium B. C. Here are the tablets on which Delitzsch, Hom-

¹⁴ *Biblical World*, Vol. XXIII, p. 217.

¹⁵ *The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi* (Luzac & Co., 3 Vols.).

¹⁶ "Some Literary Remains of Rim-Sin (Arioch), King of Larsa, about 2285 B. C."

¹⁷ See *Biblical World*, Vol. XXI, p. 217.

mel, Pinches, and Sayce have read what they believe to be the name of Yahweh as an element of the personal name Jaum-ilu. On this question may be consulted Dr. Driver's *Genesis* (p. xlix). There is no doubt as to the reading of the names, only as to whether they really imply the existence of the divine name, Yahweh. There are many other names mentioned on these tablets which, together with the names of the kings of this dynasty, have led many scholars to regard the dynasty as non-Babylonian; but there is still difference of opinion as to whether they should be called Amorite, Arabian, Canaanite, or merely West-Semitic. In any case, these names have the greatest significance for the interpretation of Hebrew proper names. Dr. H. Ranke has just published a monograph upon them,¹⁸ which refers to most of the literature.

Yet another case exhibits the contract tablets, etc., dated in each and every year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, really the second of the name, but the one so well known to us from the book of Daniel; of Nabonidus, the last native king of Babylon and father of Belshazzar, who is mentioned on several of the tablets; many also from the reigns of Neriglissar, Evil-Merodach, Laborosoarchod, Cyrus, Cambyses, the usurper Smerdis, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Philip III, Alexander IV, Antiochus III, Demetrius I, down to the year 94 B. C. The importance of such a series for chronology cannot be overestimated. The tablets are also of great and varied interest for the reconstruction of the private life of the Jews in exile, many of whose names appear on them. There are other tablets which contain the attempts of Greeks resident in Babylon to make themselves acquainted with the cuneiform writing and its literary treasures. Others are clearly copies of the sources from which Berossus and the Greek historians drew their information as to the history of Babylon. Altogether these tablets make very clear to us the way in which the "wisdom of the Chaldeans" became the property of the Greeks and through them of the world.

Few things will interest the biblical student more than the case of seals and seal rings, with the curious mythological pictures which they preserve. Here are scenes from the deluge story, representations of Gilgamesh and incidents in his career, and the picture which

¹⁸ *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, Vol. III.

has so often been held to be that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, discussing whether or no they shall eat of the tree, and the serpent behind Eve prompting her. All these have often been published, the last most recently in Delitzsch's *Babel und Bibel*.

Above them are exhibited some priceless cylinders of the kings of Assyria and Babylon, such as the Taylor cylinder of Sennacherib recounting his invasion of Palestine and the submission of Hezekiah; the broken prism of Esarhaddon, beginning with his battle against his brothers who had murdered Sennacherib and attempted to seize the throne; his prism giving his conquests and a list of the vassals in Palestine who had to assist in his conquest of Egypt, among whom he names Manasseh, king of Judah. The finest of them all is Ashurbanipal's ten-sided prism with his annals from 668 to 644 B. C. (?) There are many others; e. g., the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar,¹⁹ and others too numerous to notice here.

The land of Israel lay between the two great empires of Assyria and Babylonia on the one side, and that of Egypt on the other. For a long while Syria acted as a buffer state against the former; desert sands screened off the latter. In the days of its power Syria greatly oppressed Israel. As yet we have not much monumental evidence of early date from Syria or even Phœnicia. The chief sources of the history of Syria are Assyria and Egypt. But, in the later days, and especially in that momentous time after the Jews had returned from exile, the Aramaic, Himyaritic, Nabatean, Phœnician, and other North-Semitic inscriptions are numerous. These contain a wealth of illustrative matter for both the Old and New Testaments, as may be seen from G. A. Cooke's "North Semitic Inscriptions." In the room adjoining are some of the finest of these exhibited.

There was a greater barrier between Israel and Egypt than the desert sands. That was language. Even before Israel was in Palestine the inhabitants of that land wrote to Egypt, not in the Egyptian language, but in Semitic; not in Egyptian writing, but in cuneiform. Nevertheless, there was much in common between Israel and Egypt, and nowhere will the student find the Bible more illumined than in the Egyptian rooms. Here are the Pharaohs and the great officials like Joseph. Here everything speaks of the tomb,

¹⁹ *Biblical World*, Vol. XIV, pp. 1, ff.

but also of a life after death. The Egyptian seems to have lived for his tomb, and the way in which he adorned and illustrated it with



Photo by W. A. Mansell & Co.

THE ROSETTA STONE

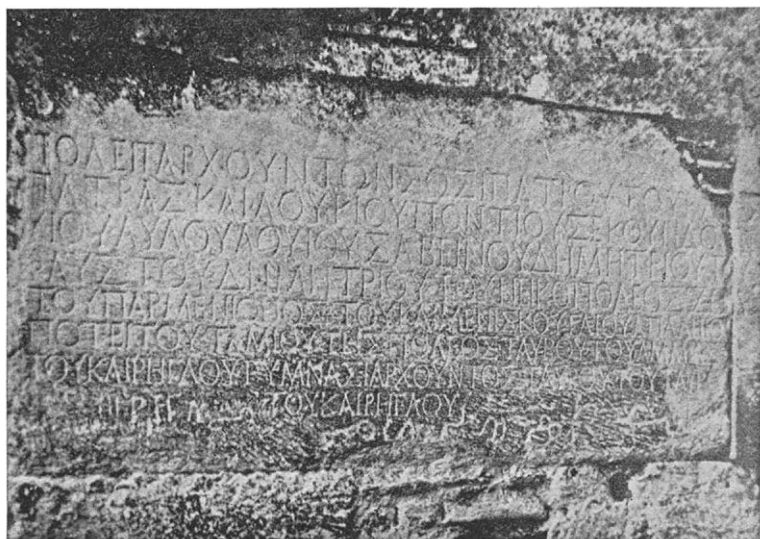
scenes from his life forms the secret of nearly all we know about him. The Assyrian and Babylonian wrote, the Egyptian painted. It is marvelous how much both have rendered immortal. Here

will be noticed the Asiatics coming down to Egypt, as Jacob and his sons did. It is difficult to suppose that we have before us anywhere the very persons named in the Bible; but what was true of one was true generally. We can gain a most lively idea of many of the early scenes in Genesis and Exodus. We may see the scarabs of Shishak and Tirhakah, if not of So (Shabaka ?). We realize what the gods of Egypt were like, and imbibe something perhaps of the wisdom of the Egyptians. We learn what the embalming of Joseph meant, and we see the background of the Alexandrian philosophy, which some think so influenced Philo, and through him early Christian theology. Here may be mentioned, though it is actually exhibited in the Southern Egyptian Gallery, the Rosetta Stone with its trilingual inscription in Greek, hieroglyphics, and demotic, which led to the decipherment of the Egyptian inscriptions. As is usual in the Museum, it has a descriptive label attached, which furnishes all needful information; but it is well to study some introductory work on the decipherment in order to appreciate the meaning of it for scholars.

Not the least interesting are things from the Christian period: scenes from the life of Christ on cloth, or Coptic ostraka with quotations from the Bible, the celebrated "mummy wheat" fabled to have come to life after being buried three thousand years, the kine of Egypt familiar to us from Pharaoh's dream, the Gnostic gems illustrating a curious early Christian sect and a thousand other items of value for illustration. The *Guides* are far more than catalogues; they give small treatises on the meaning of these wonders, and this sketch is getting to be a mere list. Here at least is a good week's hard work.

The problems of the New Testament can never be satisfactorily cleared up until we have a far greater acquaintance with the language, life, and customs of the lands where it was written. Every reader of the Greek classics will be aware that New Testament Greek is quite another tongue. Grammars and lexicons of the New Testament Greek have been written on the assumption that classical usage or later developments would solve the difficulties. Much, however, remained obscure, not to say misleading. We now know why. The contemporary Greek inscriptions have come to the

rescue. It was not defective education that led to the anomalies, nor vulgar usages. The Greek was good Greek of its day. Only, hitherto we had not much Greek of that time and place. The classical scholar may wander for hours and feast his eyes on statuary and inscriptions in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, but the biblical student will be arrested, in the Hall of Greek and Latin Inscriptions, by a Greek inscription from Thessalonica which gives the names of the politarchs,²⁰ using that rather uncommon



"POLITARCH" INSCRIPTION FROM THESSALONICA

local title, just as Luke does in Acts 17:6, 8. There is naturally much more to be seen to interest him. The papyri of Egypt have given us assistance in the determination of many a meaning. Here in the British Museum are innumerable papyri, some of a literary character, some mere bills or accounts, contracts or letters, rescued from dump-heaps or unglued from the wrappings of mummies, but all of value for the elucidation of Greek "as she was spoke" in the days of our Lord and his apostles. Some very interesting papyri are exhibited in the Egyptian Rooms, or in the

²⁰ See *Biblical World*, Vol. VIII, pp. 10-19; *American Journal of Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 598-632.

Manuscript Department. What the study of contemporary Greek has already done for the New Testament may be gauged by Dr. J. H. Moulton's article on "Biblical Greek,"²¹ where references are given. It is a great gain in reading such works to have seen the things for ourselves, especially after reading up what we are to look for in them.

The student of the Bible can scarcely well afford to neglect a knowledge of its editions, versions, etc.; especially those early authorities for the text which have received so much study of late years. The fine specimens of Hebrew and Samaritan Pentateuch Rolls,²² the celebrated Codex Alexandrinus of the fifth century A. D., the palimpsest Codex Nitriensis, Alcuin's Latin Bible, Wycliffe's English Bible, are among the exhibited treasures. The *Guide to the Manuscripts, etc.*, will give all the needed information. It is difficult to overestimate the influence which the illuminated books had on current theological ideas in the Middle Ages. They demand study for their influence on modern thought. They would need an article to themselves. It may be sufficient to point out their value for the understanding, not only of pre-Reformation theology, but also of the writings of Puritan and Anglican divines. Besides, they are a thing of beauty, each by itself. With them should be compared the early Christian and Byzantine antiquities. These are most significant, and in many directions. Thus the syncretism which annexed and consecrated to Christian use the symbols and institutions once associated with pagan worship has much to answer for; most striking bearings on the question, "What is Christianity?" Here again the exhibited articles and the *Guide* published by the British Museum are an invaluable introduction to a fascinating and fruitful study.

This sketch is deplorably superficial, but it may serve to open up a source of endless delight and instruction to everyone interested in the Bible, who will take the trouble to acquire what is offered him free at the British Museum. Splendid photographs of many of the most interesting things can be obtained from Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., 405 Oxford Street, London, W.

²¹ See *Biblical World*, Vol. XIX, pp. 190 ff.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 242.